Summer Research Grant Application
2015
Nolan Dennett

Researching: Innovation in movement art to inspire the creation of two new choreographic works.

- I have been invited (as a research assistant) to accompany Kathy Casey, Artistic Director of Montréal Danse, on a booking tour throughout Europe summer of 2015.
- This tour is a quest to identify talented new choreographer’s emerging onto the international scene.
- Selected choreographers will subsequently be invited to Montréal to ‘live’ with the company for an extended period of time in order to create new choreographic art.
- As an artistic consultant I will assist Ms. Casey in the selection process.

The benefits that will result from my research proposal are as follows:

- An opportunity to observe at close hand cutting edge contemporary work
- To closely observe emerging ideas in technical innovation that are being developed and used in live performance.
- An unparalleled opportunity to identify resources and build new bridges into the professional world that will have great benefit not only to me but any and all of our BFA candidates.
- Finally, it will be a source of inspiration to me for generating two new works that I plan to create that are scheduled to be performed in the 2015/2016 academic year:
  o Faculty Dance Concert Spring 2016 and
  o Repertory West Dance Ensemble summer concert and subsequent tour 2016 with performances at WWU, Orcas Center, Methow Community Center and others as yet to be determined

In contemporary dance art we are obsessed with originality. In order to satisfy that obsession one must constantly find ways to replenish the palette, to refill the reservoir, to find new food. We choose our subject and then devise the vocabulary, the structure and the supporting elements to serve our ideas. There is no codified system of steps or choreographic forms. Attendance at festivals in the Great Britain, Belgium and France: observations of rehearsal processes, performances and classes, lecture demonstrations, and spacing rehearsals, in depth conversations with highly regarded artists about their work and observation of technical innovations that supports that work will be a veritable feast that will revitalize my palate and enliven my senses after working over 35 years as a professional choreographer and teacher of choreography.

Ultimately there is a dialog that takes place between choreographer and audience when a work is fully realized. If I have been scrupulous in crafting a kinesthetic truth, audiences are able to see the world and themselves with clearer eyes. There is an impact that is visceral, not unlike a perfectly tuned note striking the inner ear or a visual image being burned onto the retina. And yet beyond, it is unlike anything that can be spoken or heard or seen. It is felt. And it is felt in the bodies of the viewer’s not just the viewed. The human body is quite often the subject and the
material as well as the recipient of time based art. Ultimately the experiences of the choreographer, the performer and the audience coalesce and become one.

With each new work my quest for visceral impact takes place in the exploration of movement vocabulary, movement qualities, new choreographic forms, lighting, costumes, and technical innovation. All must be carefully chosen to achieve a unity that will serve the concept.

- Enhancing professional development

There are two central areas of study in the BA/BFA Dance majors at Western: Performance and Choreography. I teach in both areas but I am primarily responsible for beginning through advanced levels of choreography—the course author and instructor of record for all levels. The craft of making dances involves; articulating an idea, finding movement vocabulary, understanding the various ways music can support movement concepts and learning to house the work in a structure that creates a formal balance.

I have created works for the National Ballet of Peru, Cornish School for the Arts, Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, Chicago Moving Company, and Goodman School of Drama. That said it is not the venue that determines the quality of the work. It is the work itself that does so. And I often feel that some of the most ‘professional’ work I have created is right here at Western Washington University.

Further, my students learn the way I learned—by seeing and participating in the making of dances of a professional standard. For this reason for me teaching the art of making dances is intrinsically connected to the process involved in the making of dances. There is no doubt that spending the summer interacting with artists who stand at the cutting edge of their profession will be a stimulating experience impossible to measure that will inspire and inform the work I create and the teaching of choreographic art I do henceforth. At the same time a bridge will be built for our BFA graduates to cross over into the professional world.

What follows is a list of venues with established reputations for producing innovative work of the highest standards. Their calendar of performances in August and September will determine my itinerary—traveling from Montréal to UK to Belgium and France then returning to Montreal, Canada. If time allows there are also venues in Switzerland and Croatia I am interested in.

- Ausform (Bristol UK) Axis Art Center (Crewe UK) Buda Kortrijk (Belgium)
- De Singel (Antwerp, Belgium) Kaii Theater (Brussels, Belgium) Stur Lewen (Belgium)
- Biennale de la Danse (Lyon, France) Festival Avignon (France)
- Festival Marseillaise (France) Montpellier Danse (France) Quartier d Ete (Paris, France)
- Vaisones Danses (France) Recontres Choreographies Internat de Seine St. Denis (France)
- Dance and Non Verbal Theater (San Vincent, Croatia) Die Kaserne (Basel, Switzerland).

I have included in this packet a letter of invitation from Kathy Casey, Artistic Director of Montréal Danse and examples of their current repertory and artists that I have worked with in the past while in residence with Montréal Danse.
October 6, 2014

RE: letter of confirmation for Nolan Dennett

To whom it may concern:

I have the great pleasure of confirming that I have requested Nolan Dennett to assist me in the selection of potential choreographers for future projects for the company I direct, Montréal Danse. I have known Nolan for over 30 years and trust his artistic instincts and sensibilities. The plan is to travel together to several European dance festivals during the summer and early fall of 2015 to look at works and investigate current trends and choreographic interests. Dance is a constantly expanding field and the importance of seeing work from different parts of the world cannot be overstated. During our travels, we will also have opportunities to speak with choreographers and other artists that will be presenting their work about how they define choreography and how current social concerns intersect with our discipline.

I find it very useful and necessary to exchange ideas and chew on questions with a knowledgeable colleague and believe that Nolan will be excellent in this role. I look forward to discussing in depth with Nolan the works we will see and know that he will be an excellent sounding board for my reflections on future choreographic collaborators.

It is impossible to predict what the impact of seeing works and being challenged by new creative concerns will be on our future projects but it is possible to say that there will definitely be an impact! This is true for me and how this trip, like others have in the past, will influence the projects Montréal Danse will develop and I believe I can say that the same will be true for Nolan’s own creations and the ideas that he will bring to the courses he teaches.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kathy Casey
Artistic Director